

GOODFELLAS

Considered to be one of the finest works of Scorsese, the movie left me dumbstruck, owing to the various aspects that one cannot help but keep admiring. We have the dialogues, the performances of Ray Liotta, De Niro, an amazing soundtrack on one hand. On the other, we have the character of Tommy de Vito, so brilliantly portrayed by Joe Pesci that it makes you fall in love with him. As a unit, the movie can be considered the greatest ever American Mafia movie after The Godfather, though they differ a lot in the themes and the hierarchy of crime.

The entire movie happens to be in the first person narrative of Henry Hill (Ray Liotta). Scorsese has done a brilliant work choosing the first person instead of the third person as it lets us see the glamor and glory of the mob life through the eyes of someone whose life had revolved around the mafia. Now, the reason for choosing Henry Hill was apt. Tommy couldn't be chosen as he was abrupt and the idea that he is telling us the story from his experience would have given us a contradictory impression to his character. Not to mention his garrulous nature as often depicted in the movie, which would have killed the purpose of a narration.

That leaves us with Paul and Jimmy. Paul didn't really have much action in his life. And as far as Jimmy was concerned, Scorsese knows that the audience would obviously root for the lead guy. If Jimmy had been the narrator, no one would have wanted him to end up in prison after being betrayed by some guy who owes his life to him. There are also quite a few occasions when the narration perspective shifts to Karen. The major reason for this shift is to let us know how others perceive Henry.

The whole plot revolves around the theme of mistakes and guilt. Mistakes so treacherous that they couldn't be forgiven. Killing Billy Batts, a made man, convinces us that when it comes to honor and respect, the Goodfellas make no compromise and risk everything. Jimmy was prudent enough to realize that Batts was a made man and killing him could land them in perilous consequences. Still, he accompanies Tommy in killing him and disposing of him and so does a reluctant Henry. Sure, Tommy loses his life for his mistake and Jimmy or Henry could do nothing about it. This situation actually yields a brilliant reaction from De Niro, when he dismantles the telephone booth under desperation.

There are a lot of other mistakes the characters commit. Henry getting involved in the drugs deal with his Pittsburgh connections in spite of a warning from Paul, Stacks having overslept when he was not supposed to, Roastbeef buying a new car for his wife, Carbone getting a 20 grand mink coat despite Jimmy's strict instructions and Lois talking on the home line in spite of Henry's instructions were evidence to the fact that mistakes have been committed and Scorsese makes sure that none of those mistakes go unrewarded. In fact, this was a way to show the audience how ruthless and callous the consequences of a minor glitch in a well-designed scheme can be in the world of mobsters.

Henry regrets having broken the Mafia code of conduct- Never rat on your friends. It's ironical to see that it was Henry who had gained the confidence of the Wiseguys earlier by upholding the same code which he breaks at the end of the movie in a desperate attempt to save his own life as well as his family's. What amazes me is that Henry was compelled to choose the life of "an average nobody" and got to "live the rest of his life like a Schnook", which is exactly opposite to what he had wished for and hence he regrets it for the rest of his life.

The inclusion of Karen plays an important role in the plot. She is ignorant of Henry's profession until the day they go on a date to The Copacabana where Henry gets to show off his money and power. The best thing about this scene was that it was shot in a single take from the backdoor entrance to the front of the bar, with the melodious "Then he kissed me" playing in the background, during which time, Henry offers money to a lot of people and exchanges smiles with everyone showing Karen the power in his pockets and the degree of connections he had. This scene is similar to one in the beginning with Jimmy distributing money to everyone in the joint and Henry looking at him ambitiously. In some way, we get the feeling that Henry has reached the zenith of his career, what he really wished for.

In the small portions of narrations that Karen has, it is transparent how much she is attracted to Henry, despite the fact that he had hidden from her that he was a mobster, in spite of her finding out about his extra-marital affairs. Scorsese has aptly depicted the transformation of Karen from a simple girl with an overprotective mother to a female member of the vicious circle of the gangster life, willing to do anything for her husband, be it illegal. By showing Henry's married life, Scorsese has enhanced the realistic nature of the plot with genuine reactions and an impressive side-story to hang on to.

Robert de Niro has done a brilliant job portraying Jimmy Conway, the cautious yet ruthless guy. He is introduced to us as a star among the mobsters entering the joint with all eyes on him. One thing about Jimmy which is clearly visible is that he is hyper cautious. He insists on leaving no loose ends. He is the one who gives Henry the "Never rat on your friends" routine. He even gets rid of Carbone, Roastbeef, Stacks and other contributors to the Lufthansa Heist including Morrie as he thought the police could find a connection through them. He even goes to the extent of planning the murder of his long-time friend Henry when he realizes that Henry might end up betraying him. But it's strange to notice that in the entire movie, Jimmy hasn't pulled out a gun himself even once.

In the entire movie the thing that stole the spotlight was Joe Pesci's Tommy Devitto. A short, abrupt, unpredictable guy, short-tempered and easily offended. Perhaps the best ever role as a supporting actor. Tommy Devitto is the guy who you don't mess up with. We get an idea of his ruthless nature when he breaks a wine bottle on Sonny's head for some meager reason. He is the guy who doesn't even hesitate to kill a made man because he cares for his reputation. He doesn't even show a tiny amount of mercy to Spider who hadn't served Tommy's drink due to some misunderstanding. He shoots and fractures his foot and even goes on to kill him showing how easily he can get offended and how brutal its consequences can be. But it's important to note that Tommy never loses his sense of humor. Every time he speaks, you can't help but laugh at his words. This makes him all the more unpredictable.

You can't stop admiring the sequence when Tommy kills Stacks. It was done with such patience that you hardly notice that the guy just got killed. And Tommy kills in such a casual manner, it makes you feel that killing someone was just another thing for the mafia. Then you hear such amazing sounds in the background, like "Atlantis" and "Layla", it makes you want to see more killings. But it comes down as a shock when Tommy gets killed. It was known that the Billy Batts case wasn't closed and something was pending. But Scorsese does a brilliant job killing Tommy at a time when everything was going good and such an incident was unpredictable for the audience.

Paul Cicero was perhaps the only character that built a positive impression in my mind by the end of the movie. He was the Robinhood of the Mafia world to whom people went when the cops were inaccessible. He was the one who built Henry's career. He was vigilant enough to warn Henry of committing any further crimes. He even helped Henry financially, though not sufficiently, when he

ended up bankrupt. By the end, you develop a feeling of sympathy for Paulie, who you feel, should not have been betrayed by Henry.

Another thing of appreciation is the implementation of pauses when Henry tells us a thing of importance or makes us realize a twist in the plot. They add a touch of expertise to the narration making us stop, look back and think carefully what had happened earlier and what was about to happen. These pauses are the things I liked the most. Pure narration and creative.

The sequence showing the busy day for Henry was a clever one. Henry had to make multiple trips and had to see multiple people while under the influence of drugs. Along with that, he had his dinner and there was even the chopper to look after. But in the end, the entire day, which seemed so busy, turned out to be a complete failure, thanks to Lois who used the home line. Henry could accomplish nothing that day. In a way, that day pretty much summed up the entire life of Henry Hill. A busy life but in the end, he was "an average nobody".

Summing up, I would say that Goodfellas is as realistic as it can be. The portrayal of the callous mafia life by Scorsese could not be any better. The characters were given real justice by the actors. The soundtrack kept the mood on. The movie succeeds in instilling the idea that mafia life is filled with glamor but the moment you start screwing up your decisions, the consequences start turning against you. The sound of Tommy Devitto emptying his gun into the camera at the end of the movie still reverberates in my mind.